



Washington State Senate

Olympia Office:
105 Irv Newhouse Building
PO Box 40439
Olympia, WA 98504-0439

Senator Val Stevens
39th Legislative District

Phone: (360) 786-7676
FAX: (360) 786-7819
E-mail: stevens.val@leg.wa.gov

March 2, 2007

The Honorable Christine O. Gregoire
Office of the Governor
Legislative Building
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Governor Gregoire,

This letter is to inquire about the Department of Corrections and your recent statement about stopping the agency's policy of releasing felons from jail. On Wednesday, February 28, my colleagues and I met with DOC Secretary Harold Clarke. At that meeting we asked Secretary Clarke about the recent DOC release of 83 felons in King County. He told us that DOC actually releases about 250 such offenders per month, or 3,000 per year. He indicated this is a long-standing agency policy.

The same day we were meeting with Secretary Clarke, you issued a statement to the media that said, "I am outraged that this has happened. Public safety is a priority of my administration and offenders must be held accountable for their actions." You also wrote Clarke a letter that said, "When it is determined that return to custody is the appropriate sanction, the offender must serve the full term of custody. Anything less sends the wrong message to the violator and threatens public safety. I expect that the department will continue to use the same criteria in determining which violators need to be returned to custody."

A statement like this indicates you are surprised by this release of felons into our community. Yet your agency director indicates it's something that's been going on for years. A March 1 Seattle P-I story stated, "...in 2003, when Gregoire was Washington's Attorney General, she was well aware of a new Corrections Department policy to quietly downgrade felons rated highly likely to reoffend – and requiring strict supervision – to a status requiring minimum oversight, if any."

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This leaves me confused. Were you, or were you not, aware of this long-standing DOC policy? What did you know, and when did you know it?

As you are well aware, this program has a direct effect on public safety. And it must be stopped. One of the felons released last week was a homeless individual in prison for rape of a child. Another was a homeless person in prison for rape. Another for indecent liberties. Others for assault and robberies. If any of these individuals harm again, the state – indeed, the governor's office – will be held to account.

Secretary Clarke is preparing a report for you on the recent deaths of the law enforcement officers in King County by offenders under DOC supervision. I would also like to know when the report will be released and would like a copy of it immediately upon its release.

When we met with Secretary Clarke, I made a personal commitment to work with him to provide funding in the budget for increasing prison space and funding for jail space. Wednesday afternoon, Senator Mike Carrell and I expressed support for a temporary solution that would stop the release of more prisoners into the community. The plan would increase the number of prison inmates who are incarcerated out of state, in order to free up room within Washington's prisons be converted into "jails" that can house felons who violate their release. While this is a temporary solution, it would help until we can fully fund more space for these felons. I hope you will support us in this endeavor. I also hope you will make corrections a priority in the state's 2007-09 budget.

I look forward to hearing from you about your knowledge of the DOC policy and the upcoming report.

Sincerely,



Senator Val Stevens

Ranking Member

Human Services and Corrections Committee

cc: Senator Jim Hargrove, Chair, Human Services and Corrections Committee
Senator Dale Brandland
Senator Mike Carrell